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TECHNOLOGY LETS SOLDIERS WITH V CORPS' 1ST ARMORED DIVISION 'ATTEND' HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION IN GERMANY

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BAGHDAD, Iraq – Seven Soldiers with V Corps' 1st Armored Division intently watched two television screens at the Freedom Rest R&R facility here. They weren't catching the latest baseball game or watching their favorite sitcom. Instead, the seven were proud parents watching their high school seniors graduate from General H.H. Arnold High School at the Kuerhaus in Wiesbaden, Germany June 5.

"This was the last of three video teleconferences held for 1AD Soldiers with graduates in Hanau, Baumholder and Wiesbaden, Germany," said Lt. Col. Chris Argo, commander of the division's 141st Signal Battalion. "The VTC was open to all 1AD soldiers with graduates in the rear."

In all, more than 25 of the division's Soldiers were able to watch here as their children graduated in Germany.

Weeks of planning and coordination were required to ensure the VTCs went according to plan. Signal and



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At the Freedom Rest R&R facility in Baghdad, Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Scott, a battalion maintenance officer assigned to the the 123rd Main Support Battalion of V Corps' 1st Armored Division, holds up a sign cheering his son Antonio's graduation from Gen. H.H. Arnold High School in Wiesbaden, Germany.

personnel Soldiers worked together to set up communications and arrange an overnight stay for the Soldiers at Freedom Rest.

"A lot of work goes into getting the system together and working," said Argo. "This is a no-fail mission."

Two VTC systems were provided for the graduation. A troop of signal Soldiers operated the VTC at Freedom Rest, along with a small extension node team that worked to relay the signals back to Germany.

This allowed the Soldiers to be part of the ceremony. While they watched, a camera captured the Soldiers watching from Freedom Rest and projected their images to a gigantic screen at the graduation ceremony. Soldiers were seated in the order their children graduated so the camera captured each individual as his graduate received a diploma. Each Soldier had a moment to be face-to-face with his child.

"It felt great to see him," said Master Sgt. Earl Edmund, a personnel NCO with the division's Headquarters and Headquarters Company. Edmund's son Neil, 17, will be attending South Carolina State University in the fall.

"I can't be there in person, so this is the next-best thing," Edmund said. "What I wish most of all was to be there to see my son. I just want to tell him I am proud of him and (that) his journey is just beginning."



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Soldiers with V Corps' 1st Armored Division applaud their graduates as they watch the Gen. H.H. Arnold High School graduation ceremony in Wiesbaden, Germany from Baghdad via videoteleconference.

During the ceremony, Soldiers held up decorated signs and cheered with as much enthusiasm as anyone attending the ceremony in person.

After the graduates were announced and the diplomas handed out, Soldiers clapped as they watched the class of 2004 adjust their tassels and toss their caps in the air.

"I enjoyed the VTC," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Scott, a battalion maintenance officer assigned to the division's HHC, 123rd Main Support Bn., who watched his 17-year-old son Antonio graduate. "It was very nicely done. I think it's a lot better that they can see us and our reaction."

After the ceremony, Soldiers were allowed 10 minutes of personal VTC time with their graduates and families.

"My son is looking forward to seeing me," said Edmund before speaking to his son. "I am sure my wife is excited about it. My oldest daughter, granddaughter and mother-in-law are there. This was kind of a reunion, because I haven't seen them in so long."

Maj. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, 1st Armored Division commanding general, made sure all Soldiers had the chance to come to Freedom Rest and relax during the day before watching the graduation, said Argo.

"I am glad the chain of command supports this function by making it as comfortable as possible for us," said Scott. "Maj. Gen. Dempsey has really taken care of the Soldiers and I, for one, really appreciate it."

